Unit .33

Session .04

The Church Is United in Hope

Scripture

1 Thessalonians 4:13—5:11

13 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. **14** For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. **15** For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. **16** For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. **17** Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. **18** Therefore encourage one another with these words. **1** About the times and the seasons: Brothers and sisters, you do not need anything to be written to you. **2** For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. **3** When they say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. **4** But you, brothers and sisters, are not in the dark, for this day to surprise you like a thief. **5** For you are all children of light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or the darkness. **6** So then, let us not sleep, like the rest, but let us stay awake and be self-controlled. **7** For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. **8** But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled and put on the armor of faith and love, and a helmet of the hope of salvation. **9** For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, **10** who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. **11** Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.

Intro Options

Main Point:
Christ's return is the hope of the church.

Option 1

Pretend the older adults' groups in your church have come to your youth group. They want to learn how to be hip and to keep up with the goings-on of today's youth. In particular, they want your group to help them understand hype: the excitement surrounding a forthcoming event.

In small groups, your students should make short guides for the older adults. These guides should answer three questions:

What's an example of bad hype?

What's an example of good hype?

These guides could take all kinds of forms: posters, skits to show the examples, rhymes to help convey the information, radio commercials, etc.

Give the students time to prepare and then to share their guides. What are some good points and patterns brought out by them?

Ask students if they would say that the church is hyped about Jesus' return. Do the church's actions show good hype or bad hype about Jesus' coming back? Today's session will look at how Jesus' return is the greatest hope we have, and how we should be hyped about it in our attitudes and behavior.

Option 2:Break your students into small groups. They will be making skits, scenarios, or comics around the theme, "You never told me." They should create a brief story in which someone finds out something too late and says, "you never told me" to someone who knew. One example might be a girl who always liked a boy, and the boy liked the girl, but he never asked her out or pursued her, and she ended up marrying someone else, only to find out the boy of her dreams loved her but never told her. Another example might be someone who worked his entire life to pay off his father's debt but had a filthy rich best friend who never told him about his wealth until they were old men. You could even make it a contest to see who can come up with the saddest "you never told me" story. Give students some time to make up their skits, scenarios, or comic stories (remind them to keep it short). Then let them share. If you want to, vote on who had the saddest story and what made it so sad.Ask them now to imagine what it would be like for Jesus to return and for unbelievers to say to Christians, "you never told me." This "you never told me" story would be far more tragic than even the worst example your students made. In today's session, we'll find motivation to share with others so that they won't say to us, "you never told me" when Jesus returns.

TEACHING PLAN

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Christians follow a resurrected Savior. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live" (John 11:25). While our souls have been set free from the curse, we still await the redemption of our bodies when Christ returns (Rom. 8:11, 23). So, in the meantime, we and those we love experience physical death. If you have ever lost someone you love, you know this is a very painful experience. But here, Paul took a moment to remind us of our ultimate hope in Jesus.

- **How is hope different from superficial positivity? Why is it important to understand that hope and grief are not in conflict?**

Paul didn't say that we should not grieve. He didn't tell us to just "be positive" and "think happy thoughts." There is a place for sorrow and grief in the Christian life. We ought to mourn the effects of the curse and long for the day when our redemption is complete, but our mourning is not a despair. It is a temporary sorrow that is characterized by hope. Hope says, "God, I trust you with the future, even though this hurts right now."

- **Why is Paul confident that those who have died in Christ will experience a physical resurrection?**

In verse 14, Paul rooted his belief in our resurrection in the fact that "Jesus died and rose again" (1 Thess. 4:13). The Son of God overcame death, and those who are children of God through Him will be resurrected, too. Elsewhere, Paul wrote that Jesus is the "firstborn from the dead" (Col. 1:18). The message of the gospel isn't just that we die and go to heaven instead of hell; it's that God is redeeming all creation by recreating a curse-free world. This began with the resurrection of Jesus, will continue through the resurrection of the saints, and will one day come to completion in the new creation. Jesus endured the curse and triumphed over it, and those who belong to Him will experience that same victory. What hope we have in Jesus!

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 104, DDG)

Second Coming of Christ

The Bible is clear that one day Christ will return in bodily form (Matt. 24–25) to rule and reign over all creation. Scripture gives no timeline as to when it will occur (Acts 1:7), only assuring that it will be unexpected (Matt. 25:8-10) and glorious (Matt. 24:30). Because of the mystery surrounding these events, several views have emerged in Christians' attempts to understand everything the Bible teaches about this return and His millennial reign. Despite their differences, all views agree that the return of Christ is the hope of every Christian, knowing that when Christ returns, all things will be made new.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Christ's return is the hope of the church.

1 Thessalonians 4

4:13-18. It is common to think of the Lord's coming as a secret vanishing, but that is not the imagery we find in this text. On the contrary, this seems to be a loud and public event. Jesus visibly descends with a shout (1 Thess. 4:16), the trumpet of God is sounded (1 Thess. 4:16), and every believer from Abel (the first person of faith to die) to the present day is physically resurrected. Imagine every grave opening and giving up its dead from ages past; seas, cemeteries, and ancient tombs releasing every saint to meet to coming King in the air. As the apostle Paul wrote, "Then the saying that is written will take place: Death has been swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54)." What a glorious day that will be!

"Holy Saturday. A day of in between. A grave is about to be emptied, but not yet. The joy of knowing what's coming; the pain of having to wait for it. An analogy for the whole Christian life."[1]

Activity

In your large group, brainstorm three lists (write these lists on the board, or have the students write them on the board): bad everyday experiences, neutral everyday experiences, and good everyday experiences. By everyday, we mean experiences most students in your youth group would have. Examples might be: failing a test, seeing a movie, getting a good Christmas present, etc.

Once you have a decent-sized list, have students get into small groups for skits (they could also work solo if they want to do drawings or comics). Count off the groups up to three. The ones should choose one item from the list of bad experiences; the twos should pick one item from the neutral experiences; the threes should pick one item from the good experiences. They should then create two short skits (or two drawings) of that experience. In the first skit, the person should go through that experience forgetting about Jesus' return; in the second skit, the person should go through the experience remembering Jesus' return. For example, if someone failed a test and didn't remember Jesus' return, he might be very upset; if he remembers Jesus' return, he might find comfort knowing his hope is in Jesus, not his grades (or, alternately, he might want to study smarter next time so he can honor Jesus better when He returns).

Let them prepare and then share their scenes. Debrief by talking about how the imminent return of Jesus should fill us with hope in even the most mundane circumstances of our days. How can we prepare for Jesus' return this week?

1. Sam Allberry, Twitter post, April 20, 2019, 7:46 a.m., https://twitter.com/SamAllberry/status/1119583045147869184

In Defense (p. 106, DDG)

We do not need to be afraid of Jesus' return. It is the day we should be waiting and longing for, not dreading. Notice the contrast between "you" and "they" in this passage. Unbelievers will be surprised (1 Thess. 5:2), destroyed (1 Thess. 5:3), and "will not escape" (1 Thess. 5:3). But believers will be unsurprised (1 Thess. 5:4), will not be recipients of God's wrath (1 Thess. 5:9), and will "obtain salvation" (1 Thess. 5:9). That is why Paul is able to say twice to encourage each other about the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:18, 5:11). This is our hope!

TEACHING PLAN

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-7

For those who reject Christ, His return will be a dreadful day. It will come like a thief and bring destruction (1 Thess. 5:1-3). But for those who trust Jesus, it is not a day to be feared because Jesus already paid the penalty for our sins. For Christians, the return of Christ is a day to look forward to and to prepare for. Much like when a special guest is coming to your house and you prepare for their arrival, so the church should be busy preparing for Christ's coming. The idea here is to not take a nap or procrastinate. Instead, we must wake up and be ready at the door for His arrival.

- **What are the characteristics of someone who is prepared for Jesus' coming?**

Paul said preparing for Christ' coming means living in the light and not in darkness (1 Thess. 5:5). But what does that imagery translate to in our lives today? Paul seems to mean that there is a certain level of wakefulness a Christian should have. We shouldn't be sleeping on the job or being slothful; we are to be alert and ready, living for Christ in our daily lives to the degree that if He were to arrive today, we would not be ashamed. Such living calls for all of the fruits of the Spirit to be present in our lives, but the prominent one in these verses is self-control. It takes self-control to not be sidetracked or doze off. The modern world is full of distractions from Christ's purpose and mission for us, so we must develop self-control if we are going to be prepared for His coming.

- **In which areas in your life do you need to develop more self-control?**

It may be related to school, sleep, sexual temptation, screen time, spiritual disciplines, or something else. We all have areas of our lives where we need to grow in self-control, and weakness in one area negatively affects the rest. Grow in self-control in every sphere of your life, and you will be living the kind of life that is prepared for Jesus' return.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8-11

Living as "children of the day" (1 Thess. 5:5) is not easy. We shouldn't romanticize it or make it seem like a walk in the park. Satan is against God's people and God's purposes. He hates when we are spiritually awake, alert, and self-controlled. So we must arm ourselves not with weapons of darkness, but with faith, love and hope (1 Thess. 5:8). Our weapons are not carnal, but they are mighty through God (2 Cor. 2:10). Faith, love, and hope are in the heart and mind, which are where the battle will be won in your life.

- **How does Satan attack our hearts and minds? How can faith, love, and hope protect our hearts and minds?**

Satan is a liar and deceiver. He whispers doubts and twists the truth. He lures our hearts into sin and unbelief, but faith in God's promises silences his lies. Love doesn't delight in sin's allure. Hope anchors in all circumstances. Filled with faith, overflowing with love, and grounded in hope, we will live as children of the day (1 Thess.5:5, 8).

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
Christ's return is the hope of the church.

1 Thessalonians 5

5:1-7. "When was the last time you wept and imagined the day of judgment unannounced and quick? It will be a day like this one. School, work, coffee, Super Bowl, snow, marriage, then judgment comes. We dwell among people who dangle on a web over the flames of hell. The driftwood of sin that the lost are holding onto does not float in the flood of judgment."[2]

"Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live."[3]

"The night is far spent, the day is at hand. There will be no place for unserious, superficial, consumeristic expressions of Christianity in the days ahead."[4]

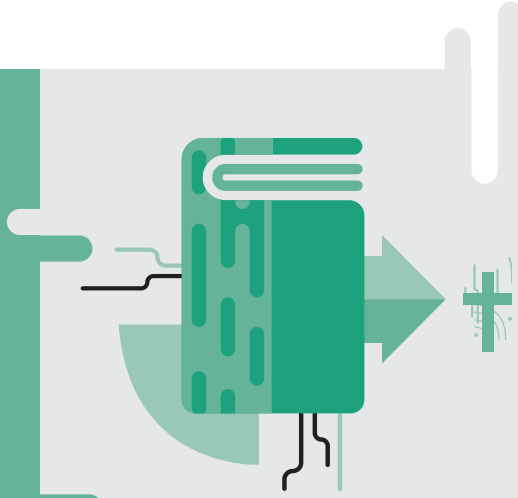
5:8-11. "Soldiers when they sleep put off their armor; but in the day when they are awake and on their guard they wear their armor, and are ready for the fray. See how much is involved in Christian wakefulness."[5]

"Not destined for wrath, but destined for salvation. What makes this word so encouraging in the moment of crisis is the absolute certainty with which it speaks. Not: you might reach salvation. Not: You might escape wrath. Not: Maybe you are destined for that happy future. But: You are destined — you are appointed — for salvation. This decision in heaven has been made. The appointment has been set. It is firm. And it is unchangeable… This is what the word "salvation" means — ultimately — in verse 9. Destined for salvation means, destined to live forever with Jesus, who loved us and gave himself for us. No wrath, only Jesus. Because of Jesus."[6]

2. *Thabiti Anyabwile, "The Glory of Pervasive Holiness in the Life of a Pastor," Desiring God, February 6, 2007, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-glory-of-pervasive-holiness-in-the-life-of-a-pastor.*
3. *Jonathan Edwards, "The Resolutions of Jonathan Edwards," Desiring God, September 30, 2006, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-resolutions-of-jonathan-edwards.*
4. *Luke Stamps, Twitter post, April 5, 2019, 4:35 p.m., https://twitter.com/lukestamps/status/1117904210056577024*
5. *Charles Spurgeon, "1 Thessalonians 5 Commentary - Spurgeon's Verse Expositions of the Bible," StudyLight.org, 2011, https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/spe/1-thessalonians-5.html.*
6. *John Piper, "You Are Not Appointed for Wrath," Desiring God, September 13, 2015, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/you-are-not-appointed-for-wrath.*

(p. 105, DDG) Christ Connection

Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them, but that He would come again (John 14:3). When Christ returns, He will make all things new and purge every stain of sin's curse. Christ's return gives the church hope and motivation to share the gospel with urgency.



UNITED IN HOPE
Christ's return is the hope of the Church.

JESUS CONNECTION
Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them, but that He would come again (John 14:3). When Christ returns, He will reverse the effects of sin and make all things new. Christ's return gives the Church hope and motivation to share the gospel with urgency.

LIFEWISE QUALITY
HOPE – Expecting God will do what is best in every situation.

HEAD
What will happen to Jesus' followers when He returns?

How can Jesus' disciples prepare for His return?

HEART

Paul says that God did not appoint His followers to experience God's anger over our sin, but to be saved from sin, death and the power of Satan. How does understanding God's plan give you hope?

Paul described the hope of our salvation as a helmet. How can hope in God's ability and desire to give you eternal life protect your mind each day?

HANDS

We often use the word *hope* for what we want to see happen, as in "I hope our team wins on Friday." But hope is not the same as positive thinking or wishful thinking. When we expect that God will always do what is best for us, we are placing our hope in God's unending goodness toward us. Think of something you are afraid of or anxious about. Complete the sentence below to remind yourself that "this hope will not disappoint us" (Rom. 5:5). Post your sentence where you can see it this week to remind yourself to pray about the situation, asking God to give you hope.

Even though [name the situation you're facing], I have hope because:

- God promised that _____.
- Jesus _____.
- And there is nothing _____.